

HIGH-GRADE MEN: IN COLLEGE AND OUT.

BY PROFESSOR EDWIN G. DEXTER,  
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS.

THE American college graduate has often been called upon to face the accusation of impracticability. From time to time men of wide influence and broad experience have censured not only his ideals, but his fitness for participation in those affairs which count for most in a modern civilization. The burden of their complaint is that he is a dreamer of dreams, not a doer of deeds, and that there is little place for him in the strenuous competition of the life of to-day. Such accusations are gradually becoming less and less frequent. Enough has been written upon the subject to prove the general falsity of the position, and no further defense is needed of college men as a class. It can not, however, be denied that as individuals college graduates meet, with very different degrees of perfection, the demands of life. Some take first rank in their chosen callings; others see their efforts crowned only with moderate success, while another, and we believe a smaller class, make partial or total shipwreck of their hopes. But this differentiation and stratification which is so noticeable in the struggle for honors in the various competitions of business and professional life was equally true for them during their undergraduate courses. In the student body of every institution of learning we find the high-grade men, the moderate successes, from the standpoint of college education, and the rear guard. A question of no little importance, and one with which the present paper deals is this: Is the high-grade man of his college days high-grade still when put to the severer tests of active life? Is the level to which he rose or sank in competition for college honors his level for life, or is there a general shifting of strata for the changed conditions? The answer to these questions is of broad educational significance. It has to do with ideals: those of the college and of life. The high-grade man in college has realized most nearly the ideal of his alma mater. He is its best product according to its criterion of success and is given its highest stamp of approval. If he fails in life, it means that judged by another criterion—that of society in its broadest sense—he is not a success; that the two criteria are different, based upon different ideals, and, as a corollary, since life is the final test, that the college ideal is not a practical one and that the aim of higher academic education is false. If, however, he holds first place in life, as he did in the preparation for it, we must conclude that the two ideals, that of the college and

F 14271

OAK ST. HDSF



that of the civilization of which it forms a part, are coincident; that, in terms of the ultimate test, the college ideal is a good one.

The present study is an attempt to follow the subsequent careers of high-grade college men in order to determine their evaluation by the world at large. It presupposes two criteria, each of which must be arbitrarily chosen, one for high grade or success in college, and the other for achievement of the same character in after life. As the former criterion, I have taken membership in Phi Beta Kappa, the honorary, college Greek letter fraternity; as the latter, mention in 'Who's Who in America' the annual biographical cyclopedia published in Chicago.

There can be, I believe, little question as to the validity of the first criterion. Election to Phi Beta Kappa is based upon marks given in course, only the high-grade men (and women) being admitted, and so far as I know, no complaint has ever been made as to the justice of election on this basis. There are at present fifty chapters of the fraternity in the colleges and universities of our country. Only students matriculated for the bachelor's degree are elected and of the entire membership 85 per cent. or more have received it in arts; the remainder in science or philosophy. This eliminates from our study the professional, technical and graduate schools and reduces it practically to the academic institutions of higher grade: in fact, the typical American college whose *raison d'être* has been more boldly questioned than has almost any other part of our educational machinery. The percentage of graduates elected to Phi Beta Kappa by the different chapters varies, being as low as 8 per cent. for Harvard and as high as 33 per cent. for several other colleges, with an average of about 16 per cent., or one graduate in six, for the whole. It is, then, this upper stratum of college men which we are considering in this study.

The criterion of success in after life which I have made use of is perhaps not so free from valid criticism. It is possible that not all would wish to accept mention in 'Who's Who' as indicative of high grade in life, yet with all its shortcomings, I know of no better criterion of success that can be applied to large numbers of living Americans. Although the names of many men and women of eminence fail to find place on its pages, it is nevertheless probably true that each who is there mentioned has achieved more than an ordinary degree of success in the chosen calling and is, therefore, entitled to be classed as high grade.

The volume chosen for the purpose of the present study was that for 1900, since it was contemporary with the 'Handbook and General Address Catalog of Phi Beta Kappa,' compiled by the Secretary, Reverend E. B. Parsons, of Williamstown, Mass., which is used in connection with it. The volume referred to contains the names of 8,602 living Americans, from every calling and profession. Of this number 3,237 are college graduates, with degrees from more than 200 institutions.

A classification of the names in it, in terms of the various professions and vocations, gives us the following numbers for the twenty-four which seem to form the most natural divisions. *Actor*: male 54, female 40. *Artist*, including illustrators: male 260, female 21. *Author*, including writer, historian, novelist and poet: male 528, female 272. *Business*, including the various mercantile pursuits: male 200. *Clergyman*, including bishop, rabbi, missionary, priest, salvation army and monk: male, 655, female 7. *College professor*, including president, dean and chancellor: male 1,090 female 11. *Congressman* (both senate and house), 446. *Editor*, including journalist, critic, correspondent and reporter: male 509, female 13. *Educator*, including superintendent, teacher, philanthropist and reformer: male 188, female 30. *Engineer*, including architect and miner: male 284. *Financier*, including capitalist and banker: male 215. *Inventor*: male 26. *Lawyer*, including justice, judge, and jurist: male 857, female 4. *Lecturer*: male 21, female 6. *Librarian*: male 362, female 9. *Musician*, including singer: male 111, female 21. *Physician*: male 540, female 7. *Railroad official*: male 102. *Sailor*: 103. *Scientist*, including naturalist: male 416, female 7. *Soldier*: 205. *Statesman*, including governor, diplomat, politician and mayor: 202. *U. S. official*: male 98, female 1. *Miscellaneous*, running all the way from farmer to insurance president: male 53, female 2. This classification is given in order to show that there is nothing in the nature of the work to make it draw more largely from the class of high-grade college men than from the low because of any limitation of calling.

The method of the present study is as follows: First, those colleges were selected which have had a chapter of Phi Beta Kappa for at least twenty years previous to 1900; and graduates only of those colleges are considered. This selection was made because of the fact that very few young men find place in 'Who's Who,' and recent graduates are practically excluded because of a virtual age limit. We have then as the basis, the twenty-two colleges mentioned in the table (a). Next, by reference to the 'Phi Beta Kappa Handbook,' the exact number of living members of each chapter were ascertained (b), 8,122 for all. Then by means of a comparison of these names in the 'Phi Beta Kappa Handbook,' with those in 'Who's Who,' the number for each chapter found in both was determined (c), *i. e.*, the number of Phi Beta Kappa men in 'Who's Who,' or the number of high-grade college men who maintained a high grade in after life, according to our criterion. The next column of the table (d) shows the percentage of such for each college, which percentages form one term of a comparison. The other term was determined as follows: By various means, though largely through the use of the 'World's Almanac for 1901' (figures for 1900), the total number of living alumni for each of the twenty-two colleges of our



list was determined and then, by a complete tabulation of all the names in 'Who's Who,' the number from each college who found mention there, ascertained, *i. e.*, the number of the rank and file—high-grade and low—who were high grade in the ultimate evaluation. These numbers are not given upon the table, but the percentage of such for each college is in column *e*. In the two columns, *d* and *e*, we have the basis of what seems to me an important comparison, the first representing the percentages of high-grade college men who were successful in life according to our criterion, and the second the percentage of good, bad and indifferent college men who achieved success in terms of the same criterion. The averages at the bottom of these columns are very expressive: 5.9 per cent. for the former to 2.1 per cent. for the latter. If we are to accept these figures, our conclusion must be that the Phi Beta Kappa man's chances of success are nearly three times those of his classmates as a whole; that the upper stratum of college life is the upper stratum still when put to the test and, to borrow further from the nomenclature of the geologist, the cataclysm of graduation does not produce a subversion of strata. An examination of the table shows that for only five of the colleges studied was the percentage of success for

Colleges.	Living $\phi\beta\kappa$ Graduates.	$\phi\beta\kappa$ Graduates in 'Who's Who.'	Per cent. $\phi\beta\kappa$ Graduates in 'Who's Who.'	Per cent. Living Graduates in 'Who's Who.'	Per cent. Elected to $\phi\beta\kappa$ .	Per cent. of 'Who's Who' Men Elected to $\phi\beta\kappa$ .
<i>a.</i>	<i>b.</i>	<i>c.</i>	<i>d.</i>	<i>e.</i>	<i>f.</i>	<i>g.</i>
Amherst.....	630	29	4.6	2.6	20	40.3
Bowdoin.....	358	36	10	2.2	25	59.8
Brown.....	658	22	3.3	1.8	25	52.4
Colgate.....	184	4	2.1	1.7	25	57.1
Columbia.....	310	21	6.7	.8	20	39.6
Cornell.....	212	11	5.2	1.6	12	30
Dartmouth.....	650	38	5.8	2.4	16	45.2
Hamilton.....	366	9	2.4	3		45
Harvard.....	1110	139	12.5	2.7	8	40.8
Hobart.....	135	2	1.5	2.6	25	40
Kenyon.....	140	3	2.1	3.6		33
Marietta.....	175	1	.6	1.1	33	33
Middlebury.....	135	3	2.3	3.3	33	30
N. Y. City Col....	185	2	1.1	.8	12	10
N. Y. Univ.....	190	6	3.1	.4		42
Rutgers.....	285	5	1.7	1.6	25	83
Trinity.....	225	12	5.3	4.1	33	40
Union.....	360	23	6.4	3	25	34.3
Wesleyan (Conn.)	375	21	5.6	3.4	25	47.7
Western Res.....	140	5	3.6	.4		45.5
Williams.....	435	33	7.6	2.8	20	54.1
Yale.....	864	56	6.5	2.3	12	24.5
	8122	Tot. 481	Av. 5.9	Av. 2.1	Av. 15.7	Av. 39.3

the graduates as a whole (*e*) greater than for their high grade men (*d*), and these colleges had so few alumni mentioned in 'Who's Who' as to give their figures but little weight in a statistical study of this nature.

The names in the two books furnishing our data, considered in still another relation, tend to corroborate the conclusion already arrived at. In column *f* of the table is shown the percentage of graduates which each college, so far as I have been able to secure the figures, elects to Phi Beta Kappa. It will be seen that there is no common custom and that the variation is considerable. Each represents, however, the proportion of high-grade men, according to our criterion, among its living alumni, and, consequently, the proportion we might expect to find among its representatives in 'Who's Who,' if high grade in college has nothing to do with one's expectancy of place in that book. The average percentage of such for all the colleges considered, as shown at the foot of the column, is 15.7.\* The next column, however (*g*), shows the percentages of such men who have actually received such honorable mention, and in the two we have the basis for another comparison: that between representation based upon the numerical expectancy of the high-grade college men (an average of 15.7 for all the colleges) and upon their actual achievement (39.3 per cent.). The comparison is certainly an encouraging one to the high-grade men, showing as it does that they have surpassed their mathematically computed expectancy by more than 150 per cent.

I have been able, through the courtesy of officers connected with two of the larger New England colleges, to supplement this study of Phi Beta Kappa graduates by one based upon the exact standing in class, of each one of their alumni mentioned in 'Who's Who.' This enables us to determine not only the percentage of high-grade men receiving mention, but also the distribution of the rest through the lower grades of the class. I had hoped to make this study cover a larger number of institutions, but have been unable to secure the data. The figures for the two are as follows:

Total number of living alumni.....	13,705
Total number mentioned in 'Who's Who'.....	303
Percentage mentioned in 'Who's Who'.....	2.2
Percentage mentioned, of those who graduated in first tenth of class .....	5.4
Percentage mentioned, of those who graduated in second tenth of class .....	2.9
Percentage mentioned, of those who graduated in third tenth of class .....	2.5
Percentage mentioned, of those who graduated in fourth tenth of class .....	1.8

\* Percentages in the column 'weighted' in terms of living graduates.



Percentage mentioned, of those who graduated in fifth tenth of class .....	1.8
Percentage mentioned, of those who graduated in last half of class.....	1.9

As may be seen from these figures, 2.2 per cent. of the rank and file of the living graduates of these two institutions achieved 'Who's Who' success, and we might with reason expect this percentage to hold true for each tenth of the classes, provided scholarship has nothing to do with honors subsequent to graduation. What we do actually find for the separate tenths is shown lower down in the column of percentages; for the first tenth of the class, considerably more than double the expectancy, and for the second and third tenths, slightly more than expectancy, and for the remainder of the class, considerably less. These percentages are based upon the supposition that mortality has been equal throughout the class and that one tenth of the living alumni were graduated in each tenth of the class, based upon scholarship. It will be seen from the figures that the percentage of success is a little greater for the last half of the class, based upon marks, than for the tenths just preceding it. This fact is even more pronounced for those who graduated practically at the foot of the class, although my figures covering that portion are not sufficiently accurate to form the basis of percentages for the tenths considered separately. I know of no way to account for this, unless it be that those students who were able to keep a foothold among their classmates only with the greatest difficulty, gave up all hope of success in those pursuits ordinarily chosen by the college graduates, following others for which they were fitted by nature rather than by training, but in which competition would be with a weaker class; while those who had made a moderate success of college work continued in a losing competition with their classmates. If this be valid hypothesis it would account for the relative success of the lowest tenth of the class.

Supplementary still to this minor study of the two colleges, I have figures for one—the larger of the two—showing the success, according to our criterion, of the men who have received first, second, third and fourth places at graduation; that is, not simply of high grade, but those who have most nearly fulfilled the ideals of their alma mater. Of the living alumni of this institution 2.3 per cent. were mentioned in 'Who's Who' and the law of probability would lead us to expect that the percentage would hold good for the men of any given place in the class. We find that eight men of the first place were mentioned; nine of second place, and six each of third and fourth places. Since, however, the class of 1832 was the oldest contributing to 'Who's Who' for 1900, we are safe in assuming that not more than seventy men of each of these places can possibly be alive and this assumption is based upon

the supposition that not one has died in all these years. Even upon this generous supposition we find that of the *possibly* living first-place men, 11.4 per cent. have gained that renown which we have taken as an indication of high grade in life: 12.8 per cent. of those of second college place and 8.6 per cent. for the next two places of honor. If, however, we apply the figures for the mortality tables of life insurance to the honor men of the last seventy college classes, we find that in all probability but forty-one of them have survived the three-score and ten years of baccalaureate life, and that our percentages are 19, 22 and 15 respectively. These, when compared with the 2.3 per cent. which represents the success of the alumni of the institution as a whole, should, it seems to me, go some way toward refuting the widely accepted belief that the college salutatorian and valedictorian are doomed to obliquity.

The statistical evidences that the high-grade college man maintains his status in after life, which are here presented, though open to all the criticisms of the statistical method, are nevertheless in accord with our general belief of what should be. If the college course is a true preparation for life, it is but natural to expect that he who best fulfils the requirements of the former is best fitted for the latter. Were this not so, we must pronounce the preparation a failure. But the educational career is more than a mere preparation for life; it is a sample of it, cut in such a way as to show as much as possible of the figure. The elementary school course, cut small as it is, can give but little of the design of the whole piece, yet it does suggest at least its general color tone. In the secondary school one may hope to discover some few of the tracings, to gain some general idea of the figure as a whole. But in the college course, taking one as it does to the period of manhood, we may expect a sample of sufficient breadth to disclose the bolder shades and the more general designs of the whole pattern. If it does not, the trouble is with the cutting, and we should cut it differently. Seemingly the work with the educational scissors is well done, and it is a matter of no surprise that the man who matches the sample best cut matches the whole piece.



3 0112 061591084